

Other innate afflictions, such as innate anger, attachment, arrogance, jealousy, and so forth, are afflictions that are induced by innate ignorance (in particular by the root ignorance perceiving true existence).

Innate afflictive obstructions are subtler than intellectually acquired afflictive obstructions but coarser than cognitive obstructions. Hence, Bodhisattvas first eliminate intellectually acquired afflictive obstructions, then innate afflictive obstructions, and lastly cognitive obstructions. Intellectually acquired afflictive obstructions are eradicated on the Mahayana path of seeing while innate afflictive obstructions and cognitive obstructions are both overcome on the path of meditation. In fact, the Mahayana paths of seeing and meditation can be categorized into ten Bodhisattva grounds/bhumis (with the first bhumi starting on the path of seeing and continuing to the path of meditation). Bodhisattvas eliminate innate afflictive obstructions while they are on the first to the eighth bhumi of the path of meditation and cognitive obstructions while on the eighth to the tenth bhumi of the path of meditation.

Cognitive obstructions

Cognitive obstructions refer to the *imprints* of the root ignorance that perceives true existence and to the *imprints* of all other afflictions. These imprints are subtle propensities or predispositions, which are left in a person's mental continuum every time an affliction arises, and which obstruct the person's mental abilities.

The imprints of the ignorance perceiving true existence, for instance, prevent sentient beings from explicitly realizing the two truths (conventional and ultimate truths) with a single awareness. They are responsible for the appearance of true existence to sense consciousnesses and other awarenesses. And they prevent sentient beings' mental consciousnesses from being omniscient.

It is important to understand that the *imprints* of afflictions are different from the *seeds* of afflictions, for the latter merely refer to the potential of afflictions to arise again. The *imprints* of afflictions, on the other hand, can still exist in the mental continua of those Arhats who have removed afflictive obstructions (i.e. afflictions and their seeds) but who are not yet enlightened.

Even though these Arhats are free from ignorance, anger, attachment, etc., and therefore exempt from such afflictions leaving *new* imprints or *new* cognitive obstructions on their mental continua, these Arhats still have to overcome the imprints that were left on their continua *before* they attained Nirvana. Therefore, while they are free from self-grasping, attachment, aversion, and so forth, their mental continua are nonetheless obscured by cognitive obstructions that prevent them, for instance, from exactly knowing sentient beings' inclinations, interests, aspirations, and so forth, and thus from leading them to enlightenment in the fastest and most effective way.

Cognitive obstructions are the subtlest obstructions and the last to be removed. Therefore, as described above, after Bodhisattvas have removed intellectually acquired and innate afflictive obstructions, they start to gradually eliminate cognitive obstructions on the eighth, ninth, and tenth Bodhisattva grounds/bhumis. The moment they attain the cessation of the subtlest cognitive obstructions, they reach the Mahayana path of no-more-learning, i.e. the omniscient mind of a Buddha.

Mahayana path of seeing	Mahayana path of meditation										Path of no-more learning
	1. bhumi	2. bhumi	3. bhumi	4. bhumi	5. bhumi	6. bhumi	7. bhumi	8. bhumi	9. bhumi	10. bhumi	
Bodhisattvas eliminate intellectually acquired afflictive obstructions	↓	↓	↓	↓	↓	↓	↓	↓	↓	↓	All obstructions are eliminated
	Bodhisattvas eliminate innate afflictive obstructions							Bodhisattvas eliminate cognitive obstructions			

This completes a brief description of afflictive and cognitive obstructions. More detailed accounts of their elimination will be provided during the presentation of the Mahayana paths of seeing and meditation.

Next is a general presentation of the five Mahayana paths. Please note that all the explanations given here apply to practitioners who engaged in the Mahayana path from the outset and who had not previously removed afflictive obstructions by attaining self-liberation in dependence on Hinayana paths.

THE PATH OF ACCUMULATION

Tibetan: ཚོགས་ལམ། *tshogs lam* / pronounced: *tso lam* (*thsogs* = accumulation/collection/assembly/
group, *lam* = path)

Of the five paths, practitioners must first attain the Mahayana path of accumulation. The criterion for entering this path is the spontaneous and uncontrived awareness that aspires to attain Buddhahood for the benefit of all sentient beings. A main mind that is such an awareness is called 'Mind of Enlightenment' or 'Bodhicitta'.

Bodhicitta is therefore described as the 'entryway' to the Mahayana paths and the criterion for entering the Mahayana path of accumulation. It is the entryway to the Mahayana paths because practitioners on the Mahayana path are characterized by having Bodhicitta. This means that for someone to be on the Mahayana path or not depends primarily on whether that person has Bodhicitta or not. The moment his Bodhicitta deteriorates, he also loses his Mahayana path and is no longer a Mahayanist. Furthermore, Bodhicitta is the criterion for entering the Mahayana path of accumulation because a practitioner's first moment of Bodhicitta is also a practitioner's first moment of the Mahayana path of accumulation.

However, due to our habitual self-centered attitude it is extremely difficult to cultivate Bodhicitta and enter the Mahayana path. Thus, development of Bodhicitta must be preceded by numerous different types of awareness which are the causes of Bodhicitta. These causal awarenesses, in turn, are the results of intense and prolonged study, contemplation, and meditation on the Buddha's teachings. Some of the most important causal awarenesses are:

- The awareness that aspires to attain liberation (also called 'renunciation')
- Equanimity
- Affectionate love
- Great compassion
- The special attitude
- Aspiration to benefit others

The awareness that aspires to attain liberation

In this case the awareness that aspires to attain liberation differs from the awareness that aspires to *merely* attain liberation, which is the entryway into the Hinayana path. Here, the awareness that aspires to attain liberation (and must precedes the cultivation of Bodhicitta) is a mind that does not confine itself to merely aspiring to attain liberation oneself, i.e. to self-liberation. Instead, it is a mind that is conjoined with an affinity for the Mahayana vehicle and thus with an interest in developing great compassion and Bodhicitta. Nonetheless, as when generating the renunciation that serves as an entryway to the Hinayana path (i.e. the aspiration to attain self-liberation), generating this mind depends on studying, contemplating, and meditating on Hinayana teachings, in particular the teachings on the four noble truths, the twelve links of dependent arising, and so forth.

The awareness that aspires to attain liberation refers to the sincere wish to overcome cyclic existence and hence the three types of suffering (the suffering of suffering, the suffering of change, and pervasive conditioned suffering). It must precede the cultivation of great compassion and Bodhicitta because one cannot wish for all sentient beings to be free from suffering if one does not wish to be free from suffering oneself.

Equanimity

The next awareness practitioners must develop is equanimity, which refers to impartiality towards all sentient beings, and serves as a basis for great compassion and Bodhicitta.